

**SAN
DIEGO
ART
PRIZE**

2022

Thank you to all our sponsors



The Library Foundation SD and San Diego Public Library are pleased to host and support this year's San Diego Art Prize. We are excited to highlight the library's role in ensuring broad and equitable access to the arts city-wide through the Library Foundation SD's support. The visual arts—in fact, all art forms—are an important part of library programming. The library provides visible opportunities for local and regional artists and connections to art and culture while encouraging access and dialogue through a cultural lens. Welcome to one of our region's most important cultural connectors and I invite you to explore all the arts and culture programming the library offers.

Patrick Stewart
CEO, Library Foundation SD



Foreword

Chi Essary

Curator and administrator of the SD Art Prize

This year the SD Art Prize sought to share our region's talent with a wider audience. In an effort to further our mission to support local artists' careers we submitted the 2022 locally nominated artists to curators outside of our region. We were excited to share with the world the unique visions and creative encounters that engender the art produced here in the borderlands and, in doing so, we hoped to create opportunities that can come with a personal introduction to a curator.

It was delightful to witness the fascination and curiosity the curators showed about our region's talent. They were intrigued to see how the nominated artists were responding to local issues such as the border, immigration, and the historic and contemporary multiculturalism inherent to our region and how that inspires and informs the art created specifically near the SD/TJ border. Congratulations to Alida Cervantes, Angélics Escoto, Carlos Castro Arias and Cog•nate Collective for being chosen by the guest selectors for the 2022 SD Art Prize. Their passion and dedication to their art enrich our community with their creative inquiries and explorations.

Thank you to the following curators for their contribution and enthusiasm in selecting the 2022 SD Art Prize recipients and the Seth Sprague Educational & Charitable Foundation for supporting this new direction:

SFMOMA, San Francisco - Jovanna Venegas, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art
Whitney Museum, New York - Marcela Guerrero, Assistant Curator
Frost Art Museum, Florida - Amy Galpin, Chief Curator
Mexico City, Mexico - José Springer, Independent Curator

Thank you to everyone who made this year's catalog a reality and free to all! It would not be possible without the generous support of Neyenesch Printers, the Library Foundation, the Executive Director of the Commission for Arts and Culture Jonathon Glus, Alexander Kohnke for his design and additional support in producing this catalog, and the generosity of your community members who contributed to our fundraiser. A very special thank you to Giant Photo Service for printing Escoto's work for the exhibition and Rosemary KimBal for proof reading.

Each year, four arts professionals from different sectors of SD's art ecosystem are invited to write about a finalist for the catalog. The writers and the Art Prize Committee submit

Carlos Castro Arias
Tio, 2021
15" x 15" x 17"
Resin mold of a fragment of a Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada sculpture, intervened with beads using symbols of the Inga culture from Putumayo, Colombia.

nominations for the following year to ensure the nomination committee is regularly refreshed with new perspectives.

A special thank-you to the 2022 writers for their contributions:

Jose Springer, Independent Curator, Mexico City

Leilani Alontaga-Caithness, Collections Specialist in Fine Art, San Diego History Center

Jordan Karney Chaim, PhD, Contemporary Art Historian, San Diego

Sara Solaimani, Professor of Chicanx Studies and Art History

The SD Art Prize celebrates artists in our region who have demonstrated outstanding creativity and added vitality to the arts community through their extraordinary contributions. This region has a wealth of amazing artists, and the SD Art Prize endeavors to recognize artists of merit by supporting and promoting those who are working to build their career and contribute to the regional arts scene.

Founded and supported since 2006 by the San Diego Visual Arts Network, the SD Art Prize was conceived to promote visibility and public interest in talented local artists and foster community engagement and critical dialogue about contemporary art in San Diego.

Presented below are the artist eligibility guidelines:

- Outstanding creativity in exhibitions or other public art presentations in the last three years.
- Live/work in San Diego County and Baja Norte region (Fallbrook to Ensenada).
- No age restriction.
- Previous San Diego Art Prize recipients are ineligible.

The SD Art Prize is not only a cash prize. It also comes with exhibition opportunities for the four finalists. We'd like to thank the downtown San Diego Central Library Art Gallery for hosting the SD Art Prize 2022 exhibition, Sept. 17th – Jan. 7, 2023, and Redwood Art Group for hosting at Art San Diego 2022, Sept. 9th – 11th.

I'd like to thank my fellow members of the SD Art Prize Committee for their generosity of spirit, knowledge and passion for the arts: Alessandra Moctezuma, director of San Diego Mesa College Art Gallery; Debra Poteet, prominent collector; Erika Torri, Director Emeritus of the Athenaeum Music and Arts Library; Patricia Frischer, coordinator and founder San Diego Visual Arts Network; and Felicia Shaw, Executive Director of the Women's Museum of California. And a thank you to our advisory committee Arturo Rodriguez, Director La Caja Gallery, Tijuana, Mexico and Johnny Tran, Owner Thumbprint Gallery, San Diego.

We always extend special thanks to the San Diego Visual Arts Network, which founded and funds the Art Prize with the generous support of its donors. (SDVAN.NET).



Memory is Elastic

Andrea Torreblanca

INSITE Director of Curatorial Projects



Angélica Escoto
**From "They go stranded/Van
ellas varadas" Series, 2015**
Photograph



Memory is elastic, it can drift from the mundane to the historical. It can be set in stone and at the same time shift with the passage of time. The four artists selected for this edition of the San Diego Art Prize are drawn to traces of a past that has been left unspoken, of bodies without language, of invisible behaviors and beliefs embedded deep in time. The philosopher Sylvère Lotringer stated that “it does not matter what is said about art as long as one pays attention to it.” This implies that art has different points of entry, even perhaps, that art repeatedly asks us to engage in speculation. The origin of the word speculation dates to the late 14th century; it means intelligent contemplation, an act of looking mentally. In other words, it involves simultaneously thinking and observing, thus paying attention. When speculating about the past, these artists confront us with fictional renderings of possible theories, the reason why memory is elastic, but also of why language is porous and susceptible to the flow of time.

“When men die, they enter history. When statues die, they enter art” is the opening line of *Statues Also Die*, in which filmmakers Chris Marker and Alain Resnais deplore how African Art was alienated from its own Culture during the French colonial project, and in consequence, was doomed to become a fetish for the Western eye inside the museum. In his work, *The Absent Father*, artist Carlos Castro Arias intervenes the fragments of statues of colonial conquerors with beads, using symbols of the Inga culture from Putumayo of Colombia. Through his intervention, the fabricated monuments have become political ruins, haunted back by their own history; their aura stripped of power while being culturally cannibalized. The operation has been subverted and displaced; the replica of the colonizer has now been detached from culture to relocate memory where it belonged.

Statues are like fossils: extinct bodies without language that can only be reimagined through time. The artist Angélica Escoto has been tracking down whales in the Baja California peninsula for more than a decade through photography and writing; she imagines herself inside a whale’s body, swimming with the parasites and cirripedes that adhere to the cetacean’s skin. For each new series, the artist appropriates titles from writers to shift the “semantics” of this historical animal, a creature that often mirrors human behavior, but that also reveals the dark side of history. Escoto is equally intrigued by how much time has gone by before the whale becomes a pile of scattered bones in the dunes. “Memory from smell is stored in the oldest part of the brain” she writes, while speculating about the age of the plants without body. Her archive is the landscape where life and extinction continuously reconfigure the geography of time.

In thinking about time and geography, the artist duo Cog-nate Collective explore terrestrial limits and their extension towards the cosmic fringe. *Otro Mundo Nos Espera*, (Another World Awaits Us) is a project that evolved from many conversations about “alter-native frameworks” to a speculative science-fiction rendering of the border between Mexico and US. Their work includes crafting a new version of the Golden Record (a phonograph record sent on the Voyager ship in the late seventies into interstellar space with sounds that supposedly accounted for humanity) with soundscapes specific to the borderlands. Cognate Collective’s new vinyl has not been sent into space yet, but functions even so as a time capsule to be discovered by extraterrestrial life or be interpreted by future societies. By encapsulating time and space, the artists abbreviate history for another world, one that perhaps demands a different language that can anticipate social and political objectivity.

Sometimes history is not about facts, but about muteness. Silence is not similar to invisibility or an act of disappearance, but rather like a needle that pierces through time. *What would have become of me, if you were here*, is a work by the artist Alida Cervantes, who uses as a framework the painting from Ecuadorian artist Vicente Albán, *Principal Lady with Her Black Slave* (ca.1783). In her painting, Cervantes has subtly blurred the gestures and bodies of the two women and transformed the vegetation of the colonial era into a landscape that resembles the flora found in Baja California. What remains in both paintings is the taciturn atmosphere that splits the two figures in an abyss of lineage, power, and race; an unfinished conversation that has been overshadowed by history.

To delve into the past goes beyond excavating history. It implies “looking mentally”, infiltrating into collective recollection by making cracks in the voids and magnifying silence. The artists in this edition bring those fissures into the fore, the empty spaces between history, the ambiguous language that remains unresolved. They reshape memory by turning it into an elastic field.



ALIDA CERVANTES

Empowering Herstories

Jose Springer

Independent Curator, Mexico City

“Con docta muerte y necia vida, viviendo engañas y muriendo enseñas.”

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *A una rosa*.

“With learned death and foolish life, your living tricks while your dying teaches.”

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *To a rose*.

Revealing, unabashed and painterly precarious, the works of Alida Cervantes sting the viewer from the outset. The moment I first set my eyes on them, their imagery seemed swiftly forthcoming; the irony and the fragmentation of her story bespoke of genius. Nonetheless, there seemed to be one last trace of restraint before they made their way into my memory. Could I feel culturally addressed by the representations, or was I overcome by the expression of the rousing act of painting?

I know well that art cannot be a tool for social change. It can draw the evils that threaten society into the open where they can be seen for what they are. It can also lure our attention to waggish circumstances involving painting's long history, like the representation of women in a society supported by segregation and puritanism. But for Alida Cervantes, painting is a way of describing situations where women can negotiate their positions of power. This may help us to appreciate the artist's concerns over her subject matter; for example, the bizarre relationships between races as portrayed in European baroque painting and those made in Latin America, known as caste paintings. These mostly anonymous works explicitly depict a mixed colonial society during the 1700s and often act as the equivalent to present-day soap operas, where the same stories are repeated over and over: the poor indigenous girl marries the rich white husband.

Formally, Cervantes has employed an assortment of calligraphy and brushwork, a style resulting in her characteristically smudged oil paint and sketchy drawing on discarded materials. This fusion creates a painterly atmosphere in her oeuvre, reminiscent of Philip Guston's cartoonish KKK paintings from the 60s and 70s. What remains of the work, after all those oil

paint splattered figures on the canvas' surface, is the aesthetic experience of ironic depictions from 20th century American history and the feeling that poetic justice has been achieved.

Alida knows her art history from the Italian Renaissance grottos that adorn the Medici palazzos and churches in Florence. The architectural decoration's chimeras and bizarre arrangements of animals and humans common in the Renaissance, serves as the basis for the latter-day grotesque styles that inform Cervantes' depictions of lavishly dressed Madonnas and lustful female saints.

These painterly renditions offer a procedure found frequently in vernacular culture: dark humor is the best approach to confront the power relations between genders. Her choice of form follows a function, the enticing choice of dramatic personae emboldens her political commentary. In the series *Santas* (2017-18) her carnivalesque interpretations of female desire reflect the expressions of a colonial society whose pretentiousness and pettiness are emphasized as a way to display their conventions and prejudices. These images also allude to the lore of the Afro Caribbean creole mimicking of their colonial masters.

Similar presentations found in Caste Paintings of the Latin American baroque period (17th century) display examples of miscegenation by combining depictions of opposite ethnic groups coming together and then giving birth to new castes: the *Indio Cambujo* or the *Salta p'atrás*. Those names bring to mind a cross-cultural landscape, one that in social terms refers to particular do's and don'ts of every group. Alida is a master at creating these visual puns.

In another of her series she draws on a *Monjas Coronadas* style to create a likeness of a mixed cocktail of sorts. Those anonymous Peruvian portraits from the 17th century serve as a mnemotechnics to remember how the language of painting developed in accordance with prejudices against African-Peruvian population. In her own painting *panache*, Cervantes is taking the long history of images one step farther, thus creating visual references to reinterpret today's cultural taboos, such as the painting of the *Santa Enamorada* (2018), a saint enamored of her black lover. Along with references to the 16th century Sevillian school of Velazquez, Zurbaran and above all Goya, the Tijuana-born artist's paintings create metaphors that neutralize the politics behind the ideology of the 'melting pot'.

Perhaps, after all, painting is a phantasm of the real and somehow artists make use of fictions to demonstrate how the world elicits its true meanings by representing cultural stories. Fortunately, Alida Cervantes unravels visual reminiscences that allow us to understand that the concept of race is a social construction and reveals the fact that one carries within oneself the memories and gazes, moods and desires that leave a mark on our own lives.



FIG. 1

fig. 1
Santa Enamorada, 2018
11.5" x 14"
Oil on cardboard



PLATE 1



PLATE 2

Plate 1
Dime si te gusta, 2021
60" x 68"
Oil on aluminum

Plate 2
El inmigrante, 2021
60" x 70"
Oil on aluminum

Plate 3
La mitad de Guerrero, 2020
78" x 60"
Oil and spray paint on aluminum



PLATE 3



PLATE 4

Plate 4
La trágica, 2020
76.5" x 60"
Oil and spray paint on aluminum

Plate 5
Top Row:
Cielito, 2022 & **Transformer**, 2022
dimensions
Oil on aluminum

Bottom Row:
Princeso, 2022 & **Terrorific**, 2022
Oil on aluminum



ANGELÍCA ESCOTO

Leilani Alontaga-Caithness
Collections Specialist in Fine Art, San Diego History Center

Angelica Escoto (b. 1967) is a Mexican artist, writer, photographer and researcher who implements a holistic approach to her practice, spending years on any given project or photo series using analog film to capture atmospheric photographic narratives informed by her keen interest in culture, identity, gender, literature, science, evolution, as well as the natural and built environment. Escoto's interdisciplinary approach aligns mostly with ecocriticism and ecofeminists whose main objective is to examine both ourselves and the world around us, while taking into consideration how we interact and represent the built and natural environment. Artworks by artists such as Escoto, are what makes those intersections clear and accessible.

In her *"Ninguna Ballena es una Isla"* (No Whale is an Island) (2005-2021), using 35mm film, Escoto has chronicled her trips to the Baja California Peninsula, a strait of land that separates the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California in Northwestern Mexico. For this series, Escoto engaged in labor intensive research across a 15-year time period that involved swimming through whale channels and kayaking into extinct volcanoes. Barren landscapes and seascapes contrast with familiar motifs such as the artist's own family, the female body, appropriated by Escoto in this case to represent womanhood and femininity, and animals, mainly dogs, running free alongside her in the natural environment.

As one of the most biodiverse regions in the world, Escoto also highlights the uniqueness of the Baja Peninsula by drawing attention to the region as a destination for whales who have been recorded to travel over 5,000 miles to the Peninsula every season to give birth to their young. Having closely studied evolutionary theory, Escoto notes that whales evolved from a canine-like land mammal that walked on four legs and closely resembled contemporary domestic dogs. Consequently, Escoto ingeniously captures images of both whales and dogs in the sea as she swam alongside them, emphasizing the implication of life coming full circle and the importance of this spontaneous observation in the natural world.

A native of Mexico City, Escoto studied Journalism at the Escuela de Periodismo Carlos Septién, and moved to Tijuana in 1991, steadily realizing photography was a medium in which she could freely expand on her varied, yet interconnected interests. While Escoto's photo-

graphs are an intersection of various ideas and theories based also on personal experience, her photos are utterly sophisticated in both composition and subject matter, forcing the viewer to critically examine existential questions regarding space, time, identity and the different ways in which we experience the built and natural environment.

In contrast, Escoto's reflections on built environments such as those around border towns in Tijuana and San Diego, implement the use of line, color and form as subjects in her photos of secondhand clothes hanging on the fences and walls along the busy streets of Tijuana. Noticing these stalls during daily commutes crossing the Tijuana-San Diego border, Escoto also comments that the border or *la linea* also marks the separation of an industrialized city (San Diego) and an underdeveloped city (Tijuana) where everything is repurposed, sold and immediately given a second life once it has crossed *la linea*. This series of photos shot in 125mm film, and titled *Walk In Closet* (2011) also highlights the environmental impact of fast-fashion and the role of the United States in this wasteful exercise considering that in 2018, 11,300 tons of textiles went to landfills according to the Environmental Protection Agency.¹ Yet, Escoto's engagement with an often loaded and complicated issue becomes a colorful and expressive artistic composition while highlighting the emergence of sustainable microeconomies that have evolved as a result of the influx of used clothing going into Tijuana.

While identity, nature and the environment have played a central role in Escoto's projects, she has also made important observations and critiques on Mexican traditions that have become widely practiced in San Diego, mainly the concept of quinceañeras, a rite of passage for Latinas on their 15th birthday. With the number of immigrant communities in San Diego rising, so has the confluence of celebrations such as quinceañeras. In the series, *Ellas No Bailan Solas* (They Don't Dance Alone) (2006), Escoto uses content from the 200 quinceañera parties she shot after she placed an ad in the *Latino* Newspaper, providing video and photography services. In this telling series that is part performance art and part documentary, Escoto delved into a world of hyper-machismo, excess and dueling identities, one in which the girl begins to transition to womanhood and leaves her childhood behind. However, this phenomenon is also at times, misogynistic in nature and rooted in Catholic traditions where the young girl attends a special Catholic mass in which various "promises" are made. This also begs the questions, why must young women and not young men, make "promises" to God and their family?

In her body of work, Escoto references cultural traditions, the built and natural environment, the female body, literature and biology, all to make nuanced connections, while considering the unique cultural exchange that exists within the region in which she lives and works. We are very generously afforded the luxury to view the world through Escoto's unique vision, in vivid and nuanced depictions of familiar places which serve as a staunch reminder of all that we should be grateful for and work diligently to preserve.



FIG. 1

1 Environmental Protection Agency Website, 20 May 2022. <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/textiles-material-specific-data>

Fig. 1
From "The Cenotes of Ana/Los cenotes de Ana" Series, 2016
Photograph



PLATE 1



PLATE 2

Plate 1
**From "Sea of barking dogs/Mar
de perros que ladran" Series,**
2019
Photograph

Plate 2
**From "They go stranded/Van
ellas varadas" Series, 2015**
Photograph



PLATE 3



PLATE 4

CARLOS CASTRO ARIAS

Jordan Karney Chaim, PhD
Contemporary Art Historian, San Diego

Carlos Castro Arias is both prolific and peripatetic: incessantly producing; working between San Diego, Tijuana, and Bogotá; absorbing and processing the conditions of our existence. The art he generates, often in simultaneous ongoing series, varies widely in medium and subject matter but maintains at its core a fidelity to a set of persistent concerns. Among these is a singular sensitivity to the dynamic between images and power relations. Whether working in sculpture, painting, or with found objects, Castro distills the role art plays in elucidating, perpetuating, or dismantling power structures into a succinct yet highly charged visual language.

Projects such as *Breathing Wound* (2011–present) and *Legions* (2011–2015) exemplify the ways in which artistic production can be subsumed into the service of dominant political ideologies. *Breathing Wound* is an ongoing series of watercolor drawings on antique paper that functions as an illustrated guide to forms of unofficial street labor performed across many of the cities in Latin America—the windshield washers, overpass sweepers, and street performers who offer their services in exchange for pocket change. Castro’s drawings reference the Spanish *Comisión Corográfica* (Chorographic Commission, 1850-1862), a colonial-era mapping and recording of the topography, inhabitants, and cultural practices within the territory that became Colombia. Through *Breathing Wound*, Castro highlights the ways in which inequitable imperialist systems of classification persist, subjugating indigenous populations and exacerbating economic disparity. In borrowing the form and technique of the *Comisión Corográfica* he is able to implicate the artist as both a facilitator and critic of the colonial project while also questioning the value of the arts as a contemporary trade.

In the sculptural series *Legions*, Castro repurposes knives into music-box-like devices that play historical wartime melodies. The knives are found objects, or perhaps more accurately, acquired objects: confiscated by police in downtown Bogotá and later were donated to Castro. As much as he transforms instruments of violence into vehicles for art, Castro is also doing exactly the reverse: by tuning his sculptures to play war music, he emphasizes the cooptation of art in the service of state-sanctioned violence, providing the anthems to centuries of



FIG. 1

Fig. 1
Madre, 2021
25" x 7" x 7"
Resin bust of Queen Isabella of Castile,
intervened with beads using symbols of
the Inga culture from Putumayo,
Colombia.

bloodshed. Embedded in both *Legions* and *Breathing Wound* is a layer of capitalist critique—one that takes an existential turn, at times conflating the value of goods with the value of existence or human life itself. By reusing confiscated knives—or, as he has done for other projects, purchasing police cars, crack pipes (bought from drug users), human teeth (sourced from dentists’ offices in Tijuana)—Castro calls attention to how slippery ethical behavior becomes in the face of money and its promises of power.

In 2017, Castro began a project driven by the recent surge in iconoclasm across the Americas. In the United States, protests over the nation’s entrenched anti-Black racism intensified after the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, leading to the destruction of many confederate monuments. During the same period in Colombia, anti-government protestors—many in solidarity with native populations—toppled statues of colonial figures to call attention to the continued disenfranchisement of indigenous Colombians. The cast bronze works, *Tío*, *Madre*, and *Padre* (all 2021) take colonial “heroes” as their subjects—Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada, Queen Isabella, and Christopher Columbus, respectively—replicating famous portrait busts and fragments of monuments. Castro disrupts traditional realism by partially covering the figures’ faces with intricate beading inspired by the craft practices of the Inga Culture, an indigenous population from southwestern Colombia renowned for their masterful beadwork. By introducing Inga craft technique and symbolism into these representations of colonial authority, Castro attempts to redress the historical erasure of native populations and rebalance the distribution of power. Castro’s aesthetic intervention here suggests a return to a prior state, reclaiming cultural narratives for future generations.

Across his practice, Castro amalgamates disparate objects, elements and ideas into poetic reflections on the human condition. He weaves in and out of history, combines parody with existential dread, fraught critiques of politics and religion with reluctant celebrations of consumption and acquisition. In revealing the recirculation of these notions across time, Castro delivers a powerful reminder that all we are, and have ever been, is human.

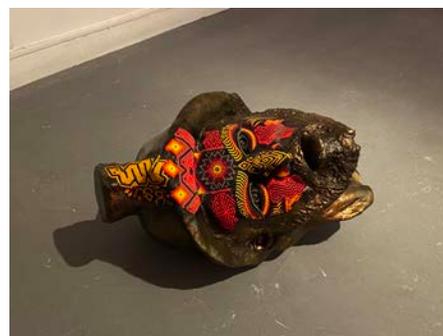


FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

Fig. 2
Tío, 2021
 15" x 15" x 17"
 Resin mold of a fragment of a Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada sculpture, intervened with beads using symbols of the Inga culture from Putumayo, Colombia.

Fig. 3
Michael, 2011
 11" x 14"
 Watercolor on 19th and early 20th century paper

Fig. 4
Legion, 2015
 Oversized music box of inserted confiscated knives by Bogota’s police, traditional Roman war melody.



PLATE 1

Plate 1
Body, 2019
Stainless steel structure, wooden base
and gas system
photo: Charlie Kitchen

Plate 2
The Witness, 2020
Aluminum, resin, wood, cell phone,
propane
photo: Charlie Kitchen





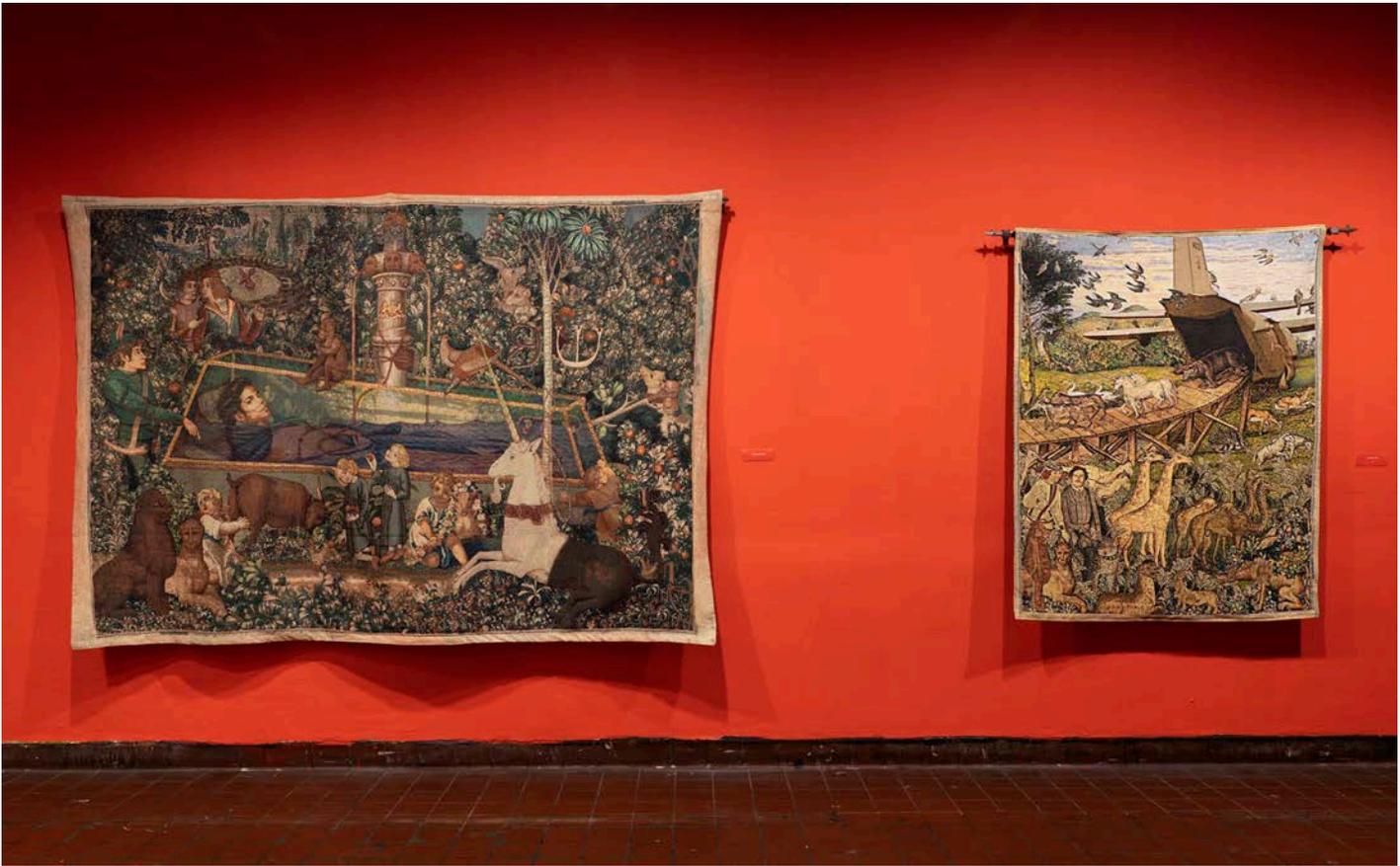


PLATE 3

Plate 3
The Awaken King, 2022
& **The Narco Ark**, 2022
Woven tapestries

Plate 4
Son of God, 2011
Human bones

Plate 5
Harvest, 2011
Human teeth



PLATE 4



PLATE 5

COG•NATE COLLECTIVE

Cog•nate Collective: of Love, Borders, Art, and Palabra

Sara Solaimani

Professor of Chicana Studies and Art History

Amy Sanchez Arteaga's and Misael Diaz's collaboration is born out of their histories of cross-cultural and counter-cultural negotiations, intersections of identity and subjecthood, conscious political positioning, and love. Love for each other and for their families, community, collaborators, and students. Love, recognition, and respect for their ancestors, and the indigenous land and ancestry that grounds their conceptual practice. This, I imagine as a tiny but mighty flame that burns wherever Amy and Misael walk and work. I felt it when I first met them at the 2013 MFA Exhibition at the UCSD University Art Gallery where Misael showed his thought-provoking readymade, *FREE TRADE*. I remember the chuckle that we had and the lively conversation we exchanged, sparked by the artwork's critical reframing of *Mexicandad* and indigeneity. That day, we talked *into* each other—about their radical practice, about my interest in documenting contemporary transborder art from an outsider/insider perspective of Iranian American Chicana scholar, and about our shared preoccupation with the many forms and functions language. I'd like to share a glimpse of their origin story before entering a discussion of their practice.

Amy and Misael met as undergrads at UCLA in 2010. Both young transborder subjects in a critical moment of their political formation, and both majoring in Art History, they first collaborated as editors and writers of *La Gente de Aztlán*, a Chicana/Latina publication on campus. They shared their unique narratives with each other, learned from one another, and bonded over the intersections of their experiences. In 2010, the two formalized their collaborative art practice and adopted the name Cog•nate Collective, as a reflection of their interest in "symbolic/discursive and material/spatialized affects/effects" of translation:

Given our own internal collaboration, and the fact that we were interested in being in dialogue with others (with the public at large, with artisans, and with other artists and cultural producers), we adopted the form of a collective. And, this was also a response to the aforementioned context of urban violence – we felt it was safer working under the banner of a collective, rather than as individuals. And here we mean safer not just in terms of concerns over public safety in relation to criminals, but also because we envisioned undertaking political actions that



FIG. 1

Fig. 1
Dialogue in Transit, 2014- present
Cog•nate Cruiser, conversations
live-broadcasted over hyper-local pirate
radio on 87.9 FM while waiting in line to
cross at the San Ysidro Port of Entry.

would skirt the bounds of the law, so we felt like we could get away with more by having a “collective” umbrella to fall back on.

Misael and Amy, brought up in the Tijuana-San Diego and Calexico-Mexicali Borderlands, are individually and collectively invested in the principle that art is a tool for self-reflection and for reimagining relationships. Reimagining our relationships to the ancestors of the lands we occupy, and to our neighbors who each negotiate their identities daily on the paradoxical U.S. border with Mexico. It is permeable to flows of capital, goods, and cheap labor. Impermeable to actual people staying/living on the north side, and to family members of workers. Cog•nate’s work reflects a breaking open of this paradox by putting its function into perspective: it is evidence of the inherent patriarchal violence, racism, and class exploitation of the current Border Industrial Complex, and we need to collectively accept that. Their mode of production complicates the paradox by challenging its power: it is time-bound and continuous, site-specific and mobile, personal and political. It does not pick a side within the binary, but rather celebrates the heterogeneity of our region’s identities, and multiplies the possibility to recognize oneself in others.

Through activations of the street, and of the cityscape, of interventions on borders between the public and the private in the larger, complex and multilayered borderlands, through radio wave occupations, through mobilization of some of the typically static platforms in academia, Cog•nate Collective embodies the social and political narrative map of the Borderlands. Part of Cog•nate’s work is to continue the legacy of art recognizing and invoking the crossing as a critical performance, on the ground and in the virtual dimension. Their *Dialogue in Transit* Series (fig. 1) and activations of the MICA•MAP trailer (fig. 2) tap us into public spaces of transborder exchange such as public markets. One of Cog•nate’s most recent works, *And Will Be Again* (fig. 4), was inspired by Chicana Feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands la Frontera*. In the form of scrolling digital signs and an audio recording, Cog•nate offered Tongva, Kumeyaay, Mixteco, Zapoteco, and Kaqchikel translations of the first poem’s last line:

*This land was Mexican once,
was Indian always
and is.
And will be again.*

The work’s embodiment of the indigenous by the technological and vice versa, beyond a *neo-indigenista* gesture or an indigenous futurist expression, acts to keep Chicana literature in active reciprocal dialogue with ancestral languages of the region, to activate translation as a political act, to preserve the oral tradition, and to educate viewers across the spectrum of aural and textual literacy in indigenous language recognition.

I had the joy of collaborating with Cog•nate on a narrative mapping project *Storylines TJ-SD* and exhibiting their work in several exhibitions. *Dialogue in Transit* (fig. 1) documentation was shown in *Occupy Thirdspace* an exhibition I curated at Space for Art in 2014. During the opening reception of that show, we broadcasted and recorded live artist interviews in the Cog•nate Cruiser, an old station wagon turned mobile mural and broadcasting station, used in many of the collective’s projects. *And Will Be Again* and *Dialogue in Transit’s Otro mundo nos espera/Another World Awaits Us* (plate 2, fig. 4) were shown *Occupy Thirdspace II: Plástica y palabra en TJ/SD*, at the San Diego Central Library Art Gallery February-May 2022.

Today, Amy teaches at the SDSU School of Art and Design, and Misael at the CSUSM’s Department of Art, Media and Design, but in a way, we are all their students. They teach us to listen to one another as an integral part of getting to know ourselves.



FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

Fig. 2
Otro Mundo Nos Espera, 2017
Series of performative sci-fi-inspired gestures of *Otro Mundo Nos Espera / another world awaits us* produced through a series of workshops with students in the San Diego State University Chicana/Chicano Studies program.

Fig. 3
Mobile Institute of Citizenship + Art, 2016 - present
Retrofitted fiberglass trailer, hyper-local FM radio station at the Santa Fe Springs Swap Meet.

Fig. 4
And will Be Again, 2021
Video poem translated into two indigenous languages from the region stretching between Tijuana/San Diego and Los Angeles (Kumeyaay and Tongva respectively) as well as 3 languages (Mixteco, Zapoteco, Kaqchikel) from Southern Mexico and Guatemala.
Credit: In “Intergalactix: Against Isolation,” at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibition (LACE),
photo: Yubo Dong



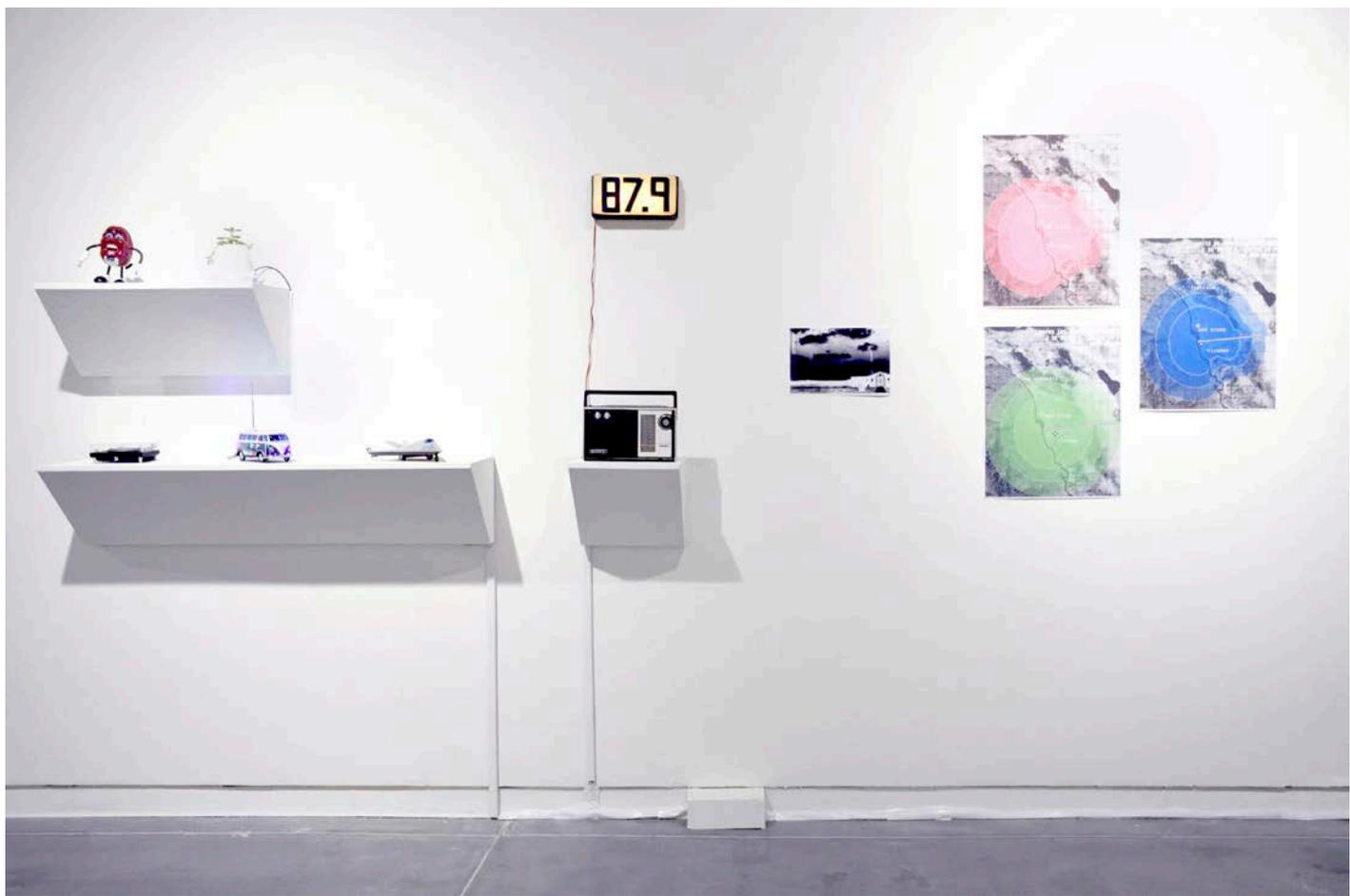


PLATE 1



PLATE 2

Plate 1
California Mía, 2018
 Aural compilation played on a collection of novelty radios sourced from public markets along the border. Credit: In "Regionalia" at CSUF Grand Central Art Center in 2018

Plate 2
Otro Mundo Nos Espera, 2017

Plate 3
Protest Balloon, 2018
 20" x 20"
 From "What do we want?" Series. Invited participants articulated their political demands on mylar balloons in response to the political rally cry "What do we want?" -- as immigrants/youth of color/latinxs/chicanxs/etc.



PLATE 3



PLATE 4

Plate 4

Es Mejor Encender, 2018

Residency at the San Diego/Tijuana border crossing with indigenous women from Guerrero living in Tijuana. "It is better to light a fire than to curse the darkness" embroidered in Mixtec and Spanish.

Plate 5

Regresa a Mi / Come Back to Me, 2018

Silkscreened candles, recitation/incantation in English and Spanish. Some printed with the testimony of a migrant detained at Otay Mesa Detention Center.

Credit: In "Being Here with You/Estando aquí contigo: 42 Artists from San Diego and Tijuana," at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Downtown, 2018.

photo: Pablo Mason

Plate 6

detail: ***Regresa a Mi / Come Back to Me***, 2018



PLATE 5



PLATE 6

SD Art Prize Recipients

2021

Beliz Iristay, Hugo Crosthwaite,
PANCA and Perry Vasquez

2019/2020

Alanna Airitam, Griselda Rosas,
Kaori Fukuyama and Melissa Walter

2018

Anne Mudge with Erin Dace Behling
Robert Matheny with Max Robert Daily

2017

Cy Kuchenbaker with Rizzhel Mae Javier
Fu/Rich with Alexander Kohnke

2016

Irma Sofia Poeter with Shinpei Takeda
Richard Keely with William Feeney

2015

Wendy Maruyama with Peter Scheidt
Roy McMakin with Kevin Inman

2014

Marianela de la Hoz with Bhavna Mehta
Philipp Scholz Rittermann with Joseph Huppert

2013

James Hubbell with Brennan Hubbell
Debby and Larry Kline with James Enos

2012

Arline Fisch with Vincent Robles
Jeffery Laudenslager with Deanne Sabeck

2011

Rubén Ortiz-Torres with Tristan Shone
Jay S. Johnson with Adam Belt

2010

Gail Roberts with David Adey
Einar and Jamex de la Torre with Julio Orozco

2009

Kim MacConnel with Brian Dick
Richard Allen Morris with Tom Driscoll

2008

Marcos Ramirez ERRE with Allison Wiese
Roman De Salvo with Lael Corbin
Eleanor Antin with Pamela Jaeger

2007

Ernest Silva with May-ling Martinez
Jean Lowe with Iana Quesnell
Raul Guerrero with Yvonne Venegas